

WMA Liaison Report
March 16, 2007
PDD Katherine Van Gorder

We are still growing! Since our last Quarterly Report, PA-2 Liberty Belles Chapter of WMA has picked up another two members. Our strength now stands at 22 proud and few Women Marine Veterans. We range in age and time of service from WWII all the way through Desert Shield and Desert Storm into the late 1990s. The only reason I can see for not having any members from the current conflict is that they are, for the most part, still over there, and for the fact that they have formed their own chapter, "The Lioness" chapter for those serving in Iraq.

For those of you who didn't know, in 1918, some 300 women answered the call to "Free a Man to Fight" by joining the Marine Corps. Released and disbanded after WWI, women again answered the call in February 1943 when the Marine Corps Women's Reserve was established, but again, when the Second World War ended, they were released from their commitments until on June 12, 1948, when Congress passed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act and made women a permanent part of the regular Marine Corps. By 1950, the Women Reserves were mobilized for the Korean War with a strength of 2,787 on active duty. Again, at the height of the Vietnam War, there were still about 2,700 Women Marines, both stateside and overseas. But not until 1975 was it approved for assignment of women to all occupational fields except infantry, artillery, armor, and pilot/air crew. Fifteen years later, over 1,000 Women Marines were deployed in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, in 1990 - 1991.

I bring this to your attention to remind you that women have been a part of the Marine Corps for many years, and our service has grown in number and evolved in diversity of occupational fields to the point where women are every bit as much Marines as their male counter parts. We are still not permitted to stand shoulder to shoulder with our "Fighting Marines", and that's not to say that we particularly want to, but that if the time comes when the powers that be decide that "What's good for one is good for all", I know that the women who serve today will be more than ready and willing to step up to the plate and shoulder that responsibility as readily, bravely and proudly as any Marine. To date, some 155,000 women have served in the Afghanistan and Iraq theaters, according to VFW Commander in Chief, Gary Kurpius, with 10 deaths and 9 wounded in Afghanistan, and 65 deaths and 450 wounded in Iraq. Not all are Marines, but there are many who are, and several from this North Eastern Corridor of PA, NJ, NY, MD, and DE.

The VFW recognizes that these future veterans now serving in harms way will be returning home some day, and will be looking for ways to stay connected with these bonds of brotherhood formed among those who have served in hostile action and lived to tell about it. I have seen this same recognition beginning to grow in the Marine Corps League, and particularly in our PA Department of the League, and it is commendable that we are beginning to open our minds and hearts to welcome those Women Marines who have served and who are now presently serving so proudly in this war on terror. The Marine Corps League will be there for them when they return, I am sure.

PA-2 Liberty Belles Chapter members, like most of us in this room, are too old to re-enlist, so we are doing our part to help those who have been there, done that and are still doing it. We have signed on with the SE PA Veteran's Center for their Friend of a Vet program and adopted one of the residents there. We have "adopted" several Marines still serving in Iraq (male and female) and been in close contact via email with them, offering moral support, friendship and comfort with care packages and email to help make their time there a bit more tolerable. We actively support several JROTC units with awards and cash prizes, and serve on the committees and boards of directors of several civic and youth programs. We hold leadership offices in several different veterans organizations, and most particularly with the Marine Corps League. We help veterans who need transportation to keep appointments, contact and support wounded Marines returned from Iraq during their recovery, and I am sponsoring a Vietnam Marine Vet's daughter for a scholarship from WMA to attend Gettysburg College. Most of all, we try to support each other, reaching out to all veterans, male or female, to let them know they are not forgotten, and that we are grateful for their accomplishments paving the way for us to follow.

On April 15 we will be hosting a Dinner near Reading to commemorate the 64th Anniversary of the Women Marines, and to honor our WWII Marines who so courageously stepped forward when it just wasn't the proper thing to do. For more information about this dinner, or if you would like to attend, please log on to our new Web Site by April 1st at [<http://wmapa2.org/>] [Click here: Home Page](#) We have established a link to the PA MCL site, and hope Don and Jim will quickly add our link to that site. We are still looking for Women Marines in the Pittsburgh area and in the Wellsboro vicinity, as well as any MCL Detachments in the Wellsboro area. Please let me know if there is one and where.

The Fewer, The Prouder, The Women Marines.
Respectfully Submitted, PDD *Kathy Van Gorder*